

RAISED EXPECTATIONS/ RISING PRICES

Users want more

Numerous studies and reports analyze user acceptance of electronic journals. Carol Tenopir has done all librarians a service by summarizing the major findings of more than 200 studies published between 1995-2003. The results are not surprising. People like using electronic resources when they are convenient and save time in the research process.

User preference for electronic as opposed to print varies by field. Certain findings have particularly important implications for library acquisitions and budgeting:

- Print is part of research in almost every discipline.
- A sizeable minority of readings come from materials that are older than one year.
- Peer-reviewed journals considered to be core to a researcher's work are sought regardless of convenience.¹

So, while users want everything they can get in an easy-to-find, easy-to-use online form, they still want and need print resources.

As will be discussed further below, many libraries are increasingly converting print journal subscriptions to e-only, even if only small temporary savings result. At least some publishers, however, are finding that the move to e-only has been much slower than expected, despite incentives to cancel print.

The American Institute of Physics (AIP) reported in 2003 that only 13% of its customers had abandoned print, though AIP believes its new policy to allow use of the electronic version for interlibrary loan will accelerate print cancellations.²

Links to full text made possible through CrossRef, and OpenURL linking via resolvers encourage users to think they ought to be able to click through to full text as a routine matter.

As scientists have become accustomed to recent (1995 and onward) back files for various titles, they have asked for complete runs of journals online. Humanists and social scientists will demand everything in the growing JSTOR archive. They will also want access to the important digitized files of original document collections on offer from Gale, Proquest/BHIL, and others as soon as they are issued.

Electronic versions of important overseas materials also are appearing, for example, the China National Knowledge Infrastructure and documents from Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

E-resource costs keep going up

Librarians were astounded by price increases announced in 2004 year for *Science* and the *Nature* research and review journals (a fast-growing brood). For some institutions, the suggested pricing for the Nature family almost doubled under the new model. *Nature* linked new pricing to market trends and pointed out that even the newer publications already have high ISI impact factors.

Librarians also protested dramatically higher prices for larger institutions for the *EMBO Journal* and its bundling with the new publication of the European Molecular Biology Organization, the *EMBO Report*—both published by the Nature Publishing Group. A use-based model for *Science* also resulted in sizable increases for institutions with active constituencies.

Libraries and publishers are both pushing for multiyear deals and five-year contracts are becoming more common to lock in prices. With the longer contracts and poor financial situation, escape clauses have assumed greater importance. Allowances for cancellations are still not generous. Announcement of an outsize price increase for 2005 also came from an unexpected quarter this year—Project MUSE, the aggregation of humanities and social science university press journals. The MUSE situation illustrates how cancellations of print subscriptions can place an electronic distribution business model in jeopardy.

The main problem is that libraries have been canceling print versions of journals at a high rate and before publishers have had time to transition toward a business model derived from an electronic base. Although distributing an average MUSE serial only in electronic format would reduce costs by around 20%, revenue to the publisher would decrease by at least 60% because of reductions in print subscriptions, advertising revenue, and reprint income. Basically, as libraries make wholesale print cancellations, the not-for-profit producers have no way to absorb print-based revenue losses.

MUSE hired consultants to survey libraries and propose viable new models. The result is a tiered pricing scheme for 2005 that will mean some institutions subscribing to the full package will have to absorb a total price increase of 25% spread over three years. The recent withdrawal of a block of Duke University Press journals complicates the MUSE situation even further.³

Price hikes for e-resources continue to exceed average annual increases in library allocations and intermitten spikes in the cost of high-profile resources worsen stress on budgets already straining to maintain existing subscriptions. Under these circumstances, how will libraries be able to make commitments to new products?

Notes

¹Carol Tenopir, *Use and Users of Electronic Library Resources: An Overview and Analysis of Recent Research Studies* (Washington Council on Library Resources, 2003) p. iv. www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub120/pub120.pdf.

²Douglas LaFrenier, "Journals: Hardcopy, Electronic, or Document Delivery. What Are the Choices?: A Not-for-profit Publisher's Perspective." (PowerPoint presentation Charleston Conference, November 2003. www.katina.info/conference/Charleston_2003_Choices.pdf).

³In August 2004, Duke announced a new STM journal initiative and at the same time withdrew 18 of its journals with the intention of making them available through a subscription package of its own.

At a public hearing at the ALA midwinter conference in 2004 representatives explained MUSE's precarious financial situation to the library community, http://muse.jhu.edu/about/muse/pricing_forum.html.